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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 THE HAGUE 000685

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CODEL WEXLER DISCUSSES IRAN, MEPP, INDONESIA, AFGHANISTAN, AND IRAQ WITH FOREIGN MINISTER

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¶11. (SBU) Summary. Representative Robert Wexler (D-FL) visited The Netherlands March 22-23 and discussed Iran, Palestinian and Israeli elections, Indonesia, and Iraq with Dutch Foreign Minister Bot. Wexler also publicly debated H.J. Ormel, Parliamentary foreign policy leader for the governing Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA) party, of which Bot is a member. Wexler met separately with other MPs on the Foreign Affairs Committee, as well as with city council members in Amsterdam to discuss Muslim integration. Codel Wexler did not have a chance to clear this cable prior to departing. End Summary.

Dutch Concerned, Hopeful About Iran

¶12. (SBU) During a wide-ranging conversation with Congressman Wexler, Foreign Minister Bot stated that the Dutch wish to see the UN dialogue with Iran continue, and said that isolating Iran would only empower the Mullahs. Bot indicated that, if the UN dialogue fails, the Dutch would support the imposition of sanctions, but expressed doubts that Russia and China would go along with this in the UN Security Council. Bot stated that it might not be necessary to isolate Iran because Iran in general wishes to maintain a form of international respectability and nearly half of Iran's population is under 21 years of age and has very different aspirations from the current government. He suggested that new ways to keep pressure on Iran may have to be found and the EU and US would need to be tough with Iran if they fail in the UN Security Council. Congressman Wexler largely agreed with Bot, saying that through no fault of either side the US and EU were working in complete concert on dealing with Iran's nuclear ambitions.

¶13. (SBU) In his remarks during a discussion on US and EU policies towards Iran and Hamas at the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) on March 22, MP H.J. Ormel, foreign policy spokesperson for the governing Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA) party, echoed Bot's comments about Iran. Ormel said that Iran is a nice country, with educated people, but run by crazy ayatollahs. He suggested that the West should find a way to directly engage the Iranian people because if it isolated Iran, its people would rally around those ayatollahs. Ormel also stated that a pre-emptive strike would be a bad idea, but that if Iran does obtain nuclear weapons, the West must consider taking military action in response. Wexler again agreed with his Dutch counterpart, saying that he also would

not rule out military action.

Hamas and Israel

¶4. (SBU) On Hamas's victory in the Palestinian elections, Bot stated that the Dutch had no direct dealings with Hamas or their representatives. Bot added that Hamas needed to take certain steps (recognition of Israel, renunciation of terrorism, and acceptance of the Palestinians' existing obligations) before the Dutch would even consider dealing with them in the future, and that there was no rush within the EU to engage with Hamas. That did not mean that Hamas might not eventually be dealt with, Bot said, adding that the PLO 20 years ago was worse than Hamas is right now.

Bot raised concern over how to deal with Hamas representatives at international organizations, and advocated for developing a unified approach. Bot and Wexler agreed that the most pressing challenge was to figure out how to continue assisting the Palestinian people without providing any money to Hamas. Bot expressed concern that if aid budgeted to build water and power plants were suddenly cut off, the Iranian government might step in to offer assistance, further destabilizing the peace process.

¶5. (SBU) Bot also indicated skepticism about Israeli PM Olmert's proposed unilateral approach to setting Israel's borders. Bot felt that it would be difficult to obtain broad support for such an agreement, and that as long as the Palestinians did not have an interest in complying, it will be hard to implement. Statements by Olmert that indicated that a unilateral plan would be a first step in the road map encouraged Bot, but he still felt that Israel would have a hard time implementing a unilateral agreement with its neighbors in the long run. Nonetheless, both Bot and Wexler

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stated that the entire peace process hinged on Olmert winning the March 28 parliamentary elections. Wexler went on to say that, following the election, Olmert most likely would lobby the USG for support of his unilateral road map and then work with the US to sell it to other countries.

¶6. (SBU) In his remarks at CIDI, Ormel, who successfully lobbied the Dutch Parliament to label Hamas a terrorist organization, expressed views similar to Bot's on Hamas, but raised some different concerns. Ormel stated that Dutch public opinion is not very favorable towards Israel, and that if there were a humanitarian crisis in Palestine, Dutch support for Israel would drop even lower. Ormel further stated that Hamas campaigned effectively by trying to address issues that worry everyone - schools, hospitals, and jobs, while Fatah was a corrupt party that voters came to distrust. Wexler rebutted that no differentiation should be made between honest and corrupt terrorists. Ormel went on to say that Hamas is not a threat to Israel because it can't make a fist. The real threat posed by Hamas is a broader one: that it is a fundamentalist party.

Wexler Asks For Dutch Perspective on Indonesia

¶7. (SBU) Given the Netherlands' long history with Indonesia, Congressman Wexler asked Bot for his advice on how best to engage Indonesia. Wexler mentioned to Bot that he nominated President Yudhoyono for the Nobel Peace Prize and jokingly asked Bot to write a letter supporting his nomination. Bot, who was born in Indonesia and visits Indonesia at least once a year, suggested that it deserved more attention as the largest Muslim country in the world. Characterizing Indonesia as stable, pro-west, and democratic, Bot said that Indonesia could become a regional counterweight to China, India and Pakistan. He said that the country first had some internal housekeeping to take care of and that it was very important for the army to modernize, but suggested that a likeable and trustworthy former general as president should help accomplish both of those challenges.

Bot Asks Wexler About Iraq

18. (SBU) Bot asked Wexler about Congress's long-term plans regarding Iraq. Wexler replied that the HIRC had not held a hearing on Iraq since May 2004, but that there was no real Congressional action for the US to get out tomorrow. Bot reported that he had been called before Parliament the day before about Iraq and was asked whether civil war had started there. Bot said that he replied, not yet, although it depends on what one calls civil war. Bot said that people in the north and south of Iraq were doing much better and would likely have little reason to start a civil war. He added that the Sunnis would undoubtedly lose to the north and south and therefore wouldn't have much reason to start a civil war. Mentioning that 1400 Dutch troops had served for almost two years in Iraq, Bot concluded that failure in Iraq would have terrible consequences.

Muslim Outreach

19. (SBU) In Amsterdam, Wexler met with city council member Ahmed Aboutaleb, the top vote recipient in Amsterdam's recent local elections and one of the Embassy's best contacts in our Muslim outreach programs. Aboutaleb told Wexler about his work with Amsterdam's mayor to promote open dialogue among different religious and ethnic communities within Amsterdam. He also discussed a course he developed to integrate the Middle East peace process into secondary education. Aboutaleb said that the course, which includes a class trip to Auschwitz, is now being given at all of Amsterdam's schools and was developed to promote dialogue between young adults who had essentially heard only their parents' perspectives on the Middle East before starting the class. Aboutaleb went on to express frustration with Prime Minister Balkenende over his slow response to the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh and blamed Balkenende's government for setting a negative climate regarding integration. Aboutaleb said that the national government needs to differentiate between extremist and mainstream Muslim parties. Diversity should lead to chances, not tension.

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Wexler later met with district council member Fatima Elatik, who showed Wexler some of the community centers she has developed in a largely immigrant sector of Amsterdam to help young and old immigrants integrate into Dutch society.

Arnall